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15 October 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

SUBJECT : Review of Agency Records Storage Problem

The Executive Director Comptroller has requested that a solution be developed for the Agency's records storage problem. First let's look at the term records storage. Because everyone makes and uses documents, (which is what he believes to be a record) and everyone has seen boxes in a cellar, attic, or warehouse (which is what he believes storage to be) the problem appears deceptively simple and its solution is hindered more by such self-improved bias than for want of solutions which are available and need only a well-founded, authoritative decision.

Every document is not a record. Most are work papers. Convenience copies are to be destroyed after they have served their purpose. Only the official record copy need be filed, and most of those kept only temporarily. A very small fraction of the records are to be kept permanently. Unfortunately, too few people know who is to keep what or how long. The personnel turn-over impairs continuity of file systems and the knowledge of where recorded information can be found. As a defense everyone keeps almost everything, until his personal responsibility is no longer endangered. His equally personal disposal of files has no coordination or concern for other components and their records needs. To preclude such an irresponsible form of records keeping as well as to forestall any fraud, the Congress, as early as 1851, passed a law prohibiting disposal of Federal "records" without Congressional approval. The law still stands, but the National Archives and a network of thousands of Records Officers throughout the Federal Government are available to assist in separating the records from the non-record material.

Unless someone is seriously interested and objective, he will not understand that records can be books, papers, maps, photographs, films, recordings, tapes, or other documents and materials regardless of physical form or characteristics, that are created or received by the Agency in connection with its business. Further, they will not realize that we keep work papers to use them, and similarly we keep files for future use, and we store records outside the office only because they have a value for future use. Authorization to dispose of old records can be obtained if there is no use for those records. Finally, we generate more than 60,000 cu. ft. of papers each year. After 20 years, we have in storage, not one and a quarter million cu. ft., but less than ten percent, only 100,000 cu. ft. Only half of that is really inactive records.

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The remainder are operational documents for future operational use with which the records storage center has been imposed upon and burdened. And so we should face the storage problem with more candor than it has enjoyed in the past.

There is no records storage problem, only a policy problem requiring a top management decision.

Does the Agency consider itself to have valuable records about which Congress is concerned? If we do and they are to be kept for future use, then the Records Center space provided should be used after the "non-records" are removed or we must use the space the Federal Government has available for such records.

Secondly, we must decide whether we want the Agency top officials to work at selecting and separating records from the non-records or if they prefer to have less expensive personnel attend to this activity. Because we generate 250 cu. ft. of new documents (30 safes full) every workday, plus the 250,000 cu. ft. already in the offices, it is not surprising that this can keep 65 Records Officers busy everyday. Because we don't have 65 Records Officers, every office keeps unnecessary material, creates more than it should, and after storing it in scarce office space and expensive safes the offices transfer it to an already overcrowded Records Center. If it is needed, is a record, and does not duplicate others, it should be kept--otherwise it should be removed. And that is why we have a storage problem. The expensive officials, acting as their own Records Officers, are part-time, inexperienced Records Officers. A few strategically placed Records Officers responsive to the Central Staff could do wonders quickly. I suggest that our plan of action be the creating of five Senior "Support Documentation Officers" to serve in each Directorate and DCI Area on problems related to records, microfilm, and ADP Documentation.

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CIA Records Administration Officer

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